



# TRUANCY COURT PROGRAM

## The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC)

University of Baltimore School of Law

**SINCE 2005, CFCC'S HOLISTIC TRUANCY COURT PROGRAM (TCP) HAS RE-ENGAGED CHILDREN WITH THEIR SCHOOLS AND HAS HELPED THEM BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR LONG-TERM ACADEMIC SUCCESS BY IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF TRUANCY.**



**On average, 75% of TCP participants graduate from the program by substantially reducing their unexcused absences and/or improving their grades and behavior.**



### FOCUS AND PHILOSOPHY

Chronic truancy is a crucial early indicator of a student's risk of dropout and later interactions with the juvenile justice system. A wide range of issues may contribute to a child's truancy—from housing instability, substance use, neighborhood violence, and illness in the family to bullying or an undiagnosed learning impairment.

Begun in 2005, CFCC's Truancy Court Program (TCP) is a data-driven intervention that works to identify and address the root causes of truancy for each child. In addition, the program seeks to improve behavior and attitudes toward school among participating students and their families. Four principles guide the operation of the TCP:

- **A therapeutic, holistic approach** – Our non-adversarial, trauma-informed model builds connections among the child, parents/caregivers, school administrators, teachers, a judge, a mentor, and service providers. We enhance conflict-resolution skills through the use of restorative practices. The TCP team strengthens relationships through intensive, confidential meetings tailored to each child's unique needs and circumstances designed to foster re-engagement with and re-connection to school.
- **Early intervention** – This voluntary program serves students who have 5–30 unexcused absences/tardies in the prior two marking periods. We work primarily with students from third grade through high school. By intervening early to address attendance issues, our team can rebuild and strengthen a student's academic, social, and emotional connections to school.
- **A focus on prevention, family involvement, and empowerment** – The root causes of truancy often occur as a result of conditions that affect the entire family. Our multidisciplinary team connects families with available social and legal services and supports. We also work to empower the family through education and guidance to promote the child's school attendance and success.
- **Rewarding progress** – Continually rewarding improved attendance and academic performance keeps students motivated and builds self-esteem. TCP students receive weekly incentives for meeting short-term attendance, academic, and behavioral goals, as well as graduation gifts upon successful completion of the program. Individuals and businesses donate many incentives, which we aim to match to each student's interests.

### TAPPING THE POWER AND AUTHORITY OF JUDGES

The TCP is strictly voluntary for students and their families. The program operates weekly in each school for 10–14 weeks per session, with two sessions (Fall and Spring) each school year. A key component of each weekly meeting is a conversation between the student and the student's parent/caregiver with a Maryland judge or magistrate, who volunteers to attend the TCP. These meetings bring the power and authority of the judge to the school without a punitive focus or adversarial atmosphere.

The judges who volunteer in the TCP are passionate about helping young people. Their stature provides a powerful presence so that, when they explain the immediate and long-term consequences of truancy, children and parents listen. Perhaps even more rewarding, by the end of the TCP session, the family has had the unforgettable experience of a judge who listens, cares, and advocates for them.

## TRUANCY COURT PROGRAM FEATURES

- **A TCP Attorney** who provides legal guidance and referrals to legal services providers, individual advocacy, and information regarding educational rights designed to enable students and families to become effective self-advocates
- **A TCP Coordinator** who serves as the program's liaison with judges and schools
- **A TCP Mentor** who works with students and parents participating in the TCP and facilitates character-building/restorative practices classes and individual mentoring
- **A TCP Social Worker** who provides counseling and advocacy and makes referrals to service providers
- **A TCP Volunteer Initiative** that brings volunteer mentors and tutors from the University of Baltimore community to the TCP schools
- **Weekly incentives** or rewards for participating students
- **Graduation ceremonies** that reward students who demonstrate a substantial increase in attendance, better classroom behavior, and/or improved grades with gifts and graduation certificates
- **Workshops for students** that help them visualize a successful future and realize their dreams—from school choice and the college application process to employment rights and writing a resume
- **Parent outreach and workshops** that empower families to address a wide range of issues that can help families achieve their goals—understanding their legal and educational rights, financial literacy, and information on college admission and financial aid, for example
- **Enrichment activities** based on funding availability, such as pizza parties and excursions, which celebrate students' achievements and help engage parents in the TCP

## TCP BY THE NUMBERS

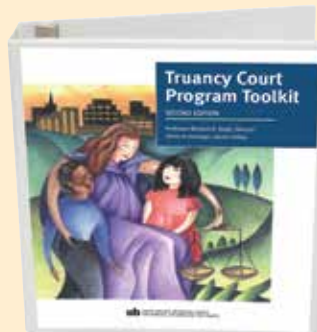
Established in 2005 the TCP has...

- Operated in more than 50 schools in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Montgomery County, and Anne Arundel County.
- Served more than 2,500 students and their families in kindergarten through grade 12.
- Engaged more than 20 judges and magistrates from Maryland's courts.

## IMPLEMENTING A TRUANCY COURT PROGRAM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The *Truancy Court Program Toolkit, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, developed by CFCC, shares the tools and resources needed to enable other communities to implement a Truancy Court Program. The *Toolkit* includes detailed descriptions of the TCP team, a step-by-step instruction guide, a comprehensive collection of forms for use in creating a TCP, and a guide to certain legal and social situations and solutions.

CFCC also offers a full implementation support package that includes copies of the *Toolkit*, along with technical assistance and consulting support to establish a Truancy Court Program. More information and a downloadable sales sheet are available on our website: [law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc](http://law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc)



## OUR TEAM

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The University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) is a national leader in the movement to reform the family justice system. CFCC works to integrate communities, families, and the justice system to improve the lives of families and the health of the community. CFCC is dedicated to resolving family problems in a therapeutic, ecological, and service-based manner.

